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Chile: Pinochet's Efforts to Strengthen Position

The Chilean press is speculating that General Pinochet, the foremost head of the Chilean National Intelligence Directorate, will be among those indicted over such in the case of the American Ambassador to the US Orlando Letelier. Because it is widely believed that Pinochet would not have acted without President Pinochet's consent, the President supports a rough time ahead and has been working to consolidate his political position. Air Force General Leigh's ouster yesterday from the ruling junta was a move in this direction.

Leigh's ouster was the culmination of his longstanding feud with Pinochet over the political future of the country. In his lifetime, Leigh's personal criticism of Pinochet during an interview with a foreign correspondent was too much for the President, who was supported by the other junta members and the Council of Ministers. Leigh's removal eliminates Pinochet's most critical colleague and strengthens the President's control over the junta.

Pinochet apparently believes his position is shaky. In recent weeks, he has been campaigning throughout the country for a continuation of his government. He has been arguing that many of Chile's domestic problems would become manageable if he were removed. Pinochet also has been successful in playing upon fears that Chile is being overruled by unfriendly governments and that it is often the victim of foreign intervention in its domestic affairs.

One result of his campaign has been the formation of a powerful political vehicle supporting the President. The Christian Democrats and other opposition

politicians have been critical of this, but they are not in a position to hinder it if Pinochet judges that the public is in favor. The President has substantial popular appeal, but personal movements have had less success in Chile than in other Latin American countries.

Despite Pinochet's efforts, some military officers are beginning to have been questioning his leadership on the possibility of replacing him. For the first time, however, the President's stability for some time, the prospect that Pinochet may be indicted argues for a (See CHILE, Page 2)

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President Pinochet (l)
and General Lech

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about sweep of the current leadership.

For the majority who still support Pinochet, however, the only way to preserve the accomplishments of the military regime is to keep him in power. Although they have little else in common, both groups believe that Contreras and Pinochet will be condemned soon by the world media and that Chile's international reputation will be even more tarnished.

Whatever happens during the next several weeks, it is clear that Pinochet is prepared to fight any move to oust him. His inclination is to tough it out, relying on his military and popular support as well as on his belief that he himself cannot be indicted in the Letelier murder. Whether he will be able to ride out the storm is an open question.